

**RECREATIONAL ACCESS POINTS**  
**Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve**

Oct. 18 2000      Jobe Chakvchin NPS

Introduction

1. Purpose of Report.....1
2. Park Mandate
3. Land Status Differences
4. Access Methods
5. Human Use Impacts

Arrigetch Creek

1. Introduction.....10
2. Air Access
3. Foot Access
4. Boat Access
5. Winter Access
6. Seasonal Differences
7. Level of Human Use Impacts

North Fork Koyukuk River.....12

1. Introduction
2. Air Access
3. Foot Access
4. Boat Access
5. Winter Access
6. Seasonal Differences
7. Level of Human Use Impacts

Noatak River.....16

1. Introduction
2. Air Access
3. Foot Access
4. Boat Access
5. Winter Access
6. Seasonal Differences
7. Level of Human Use Impacts

Itkillik River.....	19
1. Introduction	
2. Air Access	
3. Foot Access	
4. Boat Access	
5. Winter Access	
6. Seasonal Differences	
7. Level of Human Use Impacts	
John River.....	21
1. Introduction	
2. Air Access	
3. Foot Access	
4. Boat Access	
5. Winter Access	
6. Seasonal Differences	
7. Level of Human Use Impacts	
Kobuk River.....	24
1. Introduction	
2. Air Access	
3. Foot Access	
4. Boat Access	
5. Winter Access	
6. Seasonal Differences	
7. Level of Human Use Impacts	
Walker Lake.....	27
1. Introduction	
2. Air Access	
3. Foot Access	
4. Boat Access	
5. Winter Access	
6. Seasonal Differences	
7. Level of Human Use Impacts	
Other Areas.....	29
1. Dalton Highway	
2. Anaktuvuk Pass	
3. Alatna River	
4. Killik River	

Table 1 - High Use Areas .....	3
Table 2 - Air Access Route .....	3
Table 3 - Access Points and Access Methods .....	4
Park Map Overview - Access Points .....	5
Park Map Overview - Access Points and BRIM Sites .....	6
Graph of Active Sites 2000 .....	7
Graph of Active Sites and all Documented Sites 1982-99 .....	8
Park Map Overview - BRIM Sites .....	9
Arrigetch Creek / Alatna River .....	11
North Fork Koyukuk River .....	14
Middle Fork Koyukuk River .....	15
Noatak River .....	17
Itkillik River Valley .....	20
Anaktuvuk Pass (John River) .....	23
Kobuk River (Walker Lake) .....	26
Upper Alatna River .....	32
Nigu River (Upper Alatna River) .....	33
Kurupa Lake (Killik River) .....	35

*Recreational Access Points  
Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve*

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to define and describe the recreational access entry points and corridors within Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve (GAAR). The report shows the common air access points utilized by commercial charter companies and independent travelers to access GAAR. It also describes foot access points from the Dalton Highway and Anaktuvuk Pass into the park.

Map locations showing established campsites throughout Gates are also provided. These impacted sites are a part of the Brooks Range Impact Monitoring (BRIM) Program; a recreational campsite monitoring program established by Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 1994 and adapted for Gates of the Arctic and Noatak National Preserve. Monitoring these sites provides an indirect measure of recreational use patterns and areas of special interest.

### **Park Mandate**

GAARs mandate under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) sec. 201 (a) is, "...to maintain the wild and undeveloped character of the area..." One of GAAR's mandates made explicit in ANILCA is also to provide opportunities, including reasonable access, for various types of wilderness recreation. A balance must be found between unnecessarily restrictive regulations that limit or restrict recreational opportunities, and excessive human impacts that damage landscapes and ecosystems. The ideal balance would provide a range of high-quality wilderness recreational opportunities (NPS-GMP-GAAR, 1986).

### **Land Status and General Use Activities**

National Park wilderness comprises 7,167,192 acres of GAAR, while 945,400 acres is designated national preserve. The National Preserves in GAAR consist of the Itkillik and Kobuk Valleys. Residents from the communities of Anaktuvuk Pass, Nuiqsut, Wiseman, Bettles, Evansville, Alatna, Allakaket, Hughes, Kobuk, Shungnak, and Ambler can access GAAR throughout the entire year for their subsistence and trapping activities. These subsistence activities may occur throughout the park, and involve the taking of moose, caribou or bear, as well as winter trapping and use of trees and vegetation. Sport fishing activities by recreational users is allowed throughout the year on all park lands. Sport hunting activities are permitted only in the two national preserves during hunting seasons.

### **Access Methods**

As there are no roads within the park or preserves, the majority of recreational visitors access GAAR by light aircraft to begin their trips. These light aircraft include float and wheeled planes. Float planes include; Beaver, Cessna 185, and 206, Supercubs and small single engine aircraft. Float planes land on lakes, ponds, sloughs, and rivers throughout the park. They are convenient for carrying rafts, hardshell or collapsible canoes, and up to two to five people with gear. Wheeled



planes include; Supercub, Cessna 185 and Helio Courier. Most wheeled planes land on gravel bars, ridgetops or remote gravel strips along rivers.

Bettles serves as the major hub for air taxi operators for recreationists in the Central Brooks Range. A small portion of river floaters access the Noatak or Kobuk Rivers by using air taxi operators from Kotzebue, Ambler or Fairbanks. Commercial flights from Fairbanks to Anaktuvuk Pass provide access for those wishing to start their trip from Anaktuvuk Pass. A small number of visitors drive from Fairbanks along the Dalton Highway and access GAAR by foot from points on the highway.

The majority of recreational access into Gates is via light aircraft flown by air taxi operators, as well as periodic private air traffic. The nature of this remote wilderness is such that air access is the only practical means of accessing GAAR. Access to high use sites at Arrigetch Creek and the Noatak River is via a flight pattern from Bettles through the Alatna River Valley. The North Fork Koyukuk River and Itkilik Valley also share the same flight pattern from Bettles, which is through the North Fork Koyukuk River valley. The John River valley is also a high air traffic corridor as it provides access to commercial traffic from Bettles and Fairbanks to Anaktuvuk Pass. (See Table 1)

Commercial operators provide limited visitor use data by documenting client numbers and reporting them to the park administration as a requirement of Incidental Business Permits. Voluntary visitor use registration currently in place for backpackers and floaters, provides only limited visitor use estimates. (See report on the Summary of Backcountry Patrol Visitor Data (Unpublished report GAAR 1999)). Air tours, which started in 1998, are continuing to attract visitors. In 1999 tours from Fairbanks stopped at Bettles for a short visit and then flew over eastern portions of the park before returning to Fairbanks. Sport hunters, backpackers and floaters generally use air taxi operators and/or commercial guides to access remote lakes, rivers, and gravel bars in GAAR. (See Table 2 & 3). Less frequent access is provided by private aircraft.

### Human Use Impacts

The BRIM database indicates that most of the documented human use sites (landing points, river put-ins, campsites and viewpoints) are located in four drainages. Arrigetch Creek, Noatak River, North Fork Koyukuk River and Walker Lake have comprised 80 percent (89 of 112) of all documented sites since GAAR's original campsite inventory program was initiated in 1982. Changes in visitor use have resulted in 55 percent (62 of 112) of the documented sites to be abandoned, no longer in use, and recovering from past human use. Of the remaining active sites that are currently in use, 89 percent (55 of 62) are located in three drainages including Walker Lake, Noatak River, and Arrigetch Creek.

Recreational users float the Alatna, John, Kobuk, Killik, Noatak, and North Fork Koyukuk Rivers throughout the short summer season. Out of all these the Noatak River with 11 sites has the highest number of active recreational use sites. (See Table 5). Most of the campsites in these river valleys are on gravel/sand bars. Spring breakup and annual floods tend to wash away the impacts of these sites.

*Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve  
High Use Areas, 1970-1999*

Drainage Area	1970-1979	1980-1989	1990-1999
Walker Lake	Moderate-High	Moderate	Low
Noatak River	Low	Moderate-High	High
Arrigetch Creek	Moderate	Moderate-High	High
N.F. Koyukuk River	Low-Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
John River	Moderate	Low	Low

Table 1. The compilation of this data is based on observations from past staff. No hard numbers of use patterns exist for the whole time period. Since GAAR was established in 1980, assumptions of use levels were made based on the number and relative condition of campsites through photos taken in the early to mid 1980's.

*Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve  
Air Access Routes*

RECREATIONAL USE AREA	AIR ACCESS ROUTE
Noatak River, Alatna River, Arrigetch Creek	Alatna River Drainage, Noatak River
Itkillik Valley, North Fork Koyukuk River	North Fork Koyukuk River
Kobuk River	Kobuk River
Hunt Fork, John River	John River

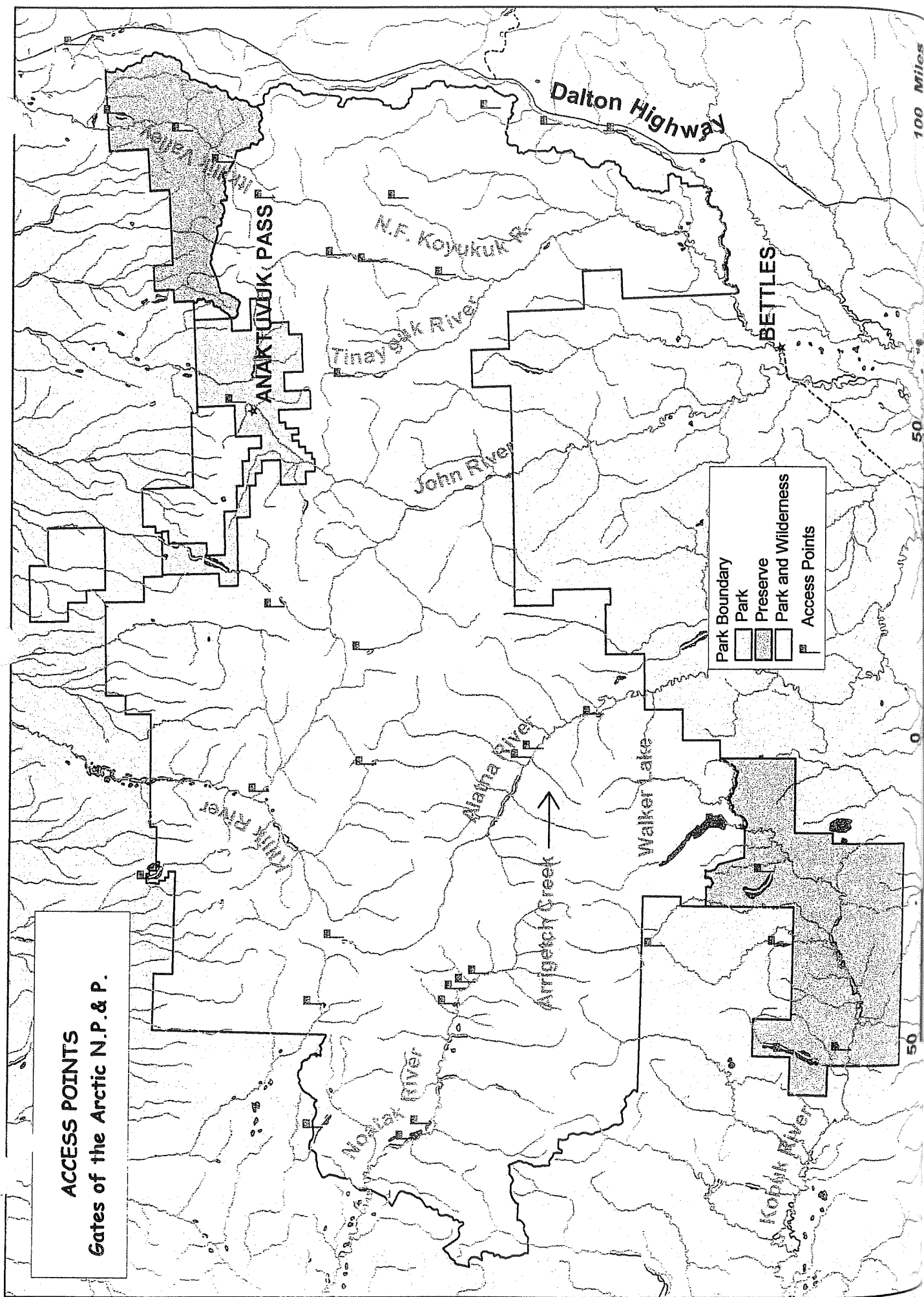
Table 2. Most of the access routes to the recreational use areas share the same flight pattern out of Bettles.

*Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve  
Access Points and Access Methods*

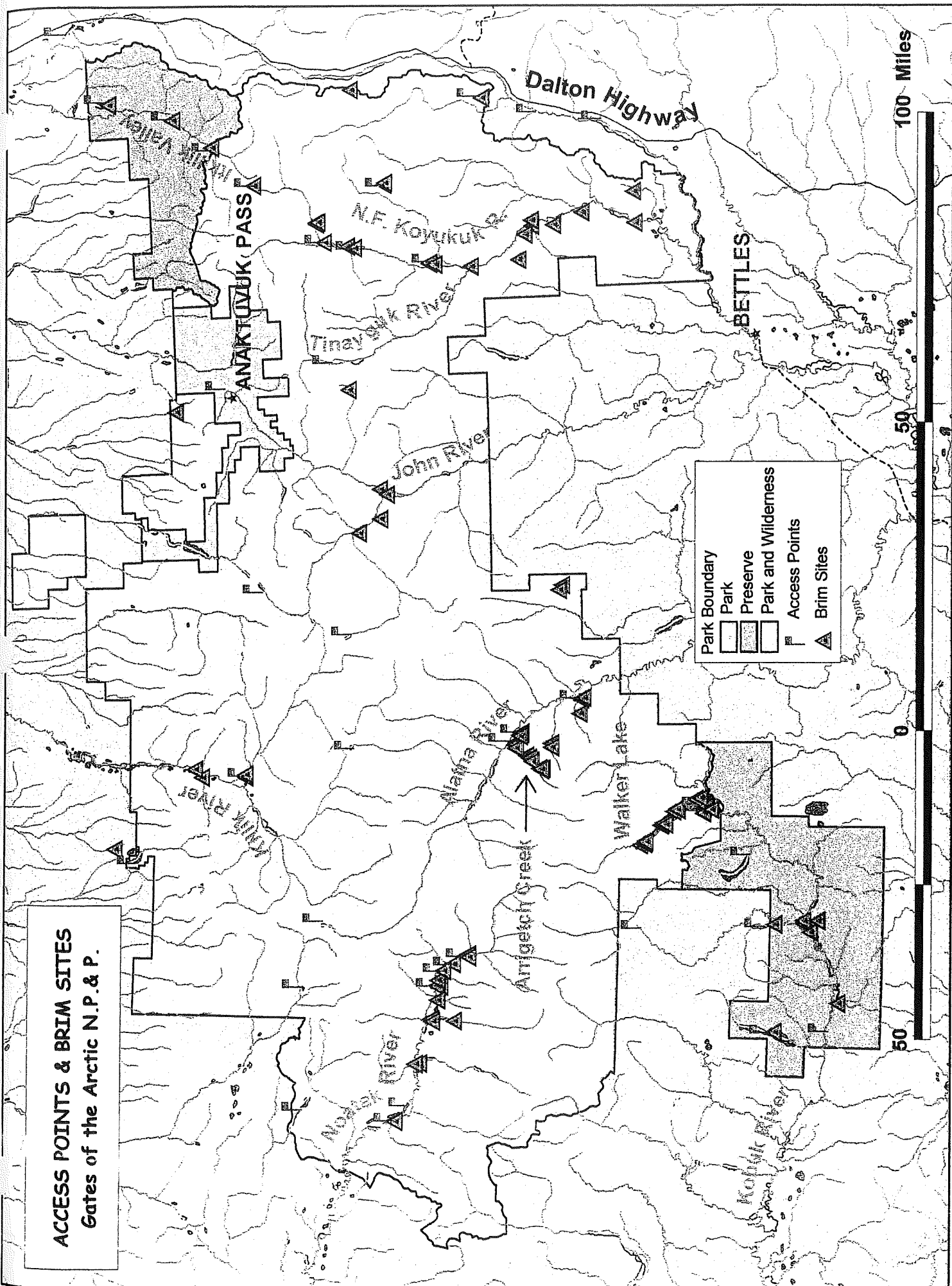
<i>RECREATIONAL USE AREA</i>	<i>ACCESS POINT DROP OFF</i>	<i>ACCESS POINT PICK UP</i>	<i>ACCESS METHOD</i>
Arrigetch Creek	Circle Lake, Arrigetch Creek confluence, Takahula Lake, Kutuk Lake, Walker Lake	Circle Lake, Takahula Lake	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats
Alatna River	Alatna Summit Lake	Takahula Lake, Helpme Jack Lakes, Alatna	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats
Noatak River	12 Mile Slough, Portage Lake, Nelson Walker Lake, Pingo Lake	Matcharak Lake, Kavachurak Lake, Noatak Village	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats
North Fork Koyukuk River/ Tinyaguk (limited wheel access)	"Ernie Creek Bar", "Gates Bar", "Deadman Bar", "Kachwana Creek Bar", Red Star, Summit, Oolah, and Chimney Lakes	Bettles	Supercub, Helio Courier, Beaver
Itkillik Valley	Itkillik Lake, Island Lake, Oolah Lake, Summit Lake	Same as Drop off points	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats, Foot Access from Dalton Hwy.
John River	Anaktuvuk Pass, Hunt Fork Lake, Natat Lake	Middle Fork Koyukuk River, Bettles	Commercial Air Taxi to Anaktuvuk Pass, Beaver w/floats
Kobuk River Reed River Beaver Creek	Walker Lake, Minakakosa Lake, Nutuvukti Lake, "Kobuk International"	"Kobuk International", Pah River, Kobuk Village	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats
Walker Lake	Walker Lake	Walker Lake	Beaver w/floats, C185 w/floats

Table 3. Most Recreational use areas have multiple access points. This table of access points shows only put-in points for the use area. The Access Point "Kobuk International" is not an official place name, but a section of the Upper Kobuk River. See attached Kobuk River Access Map.

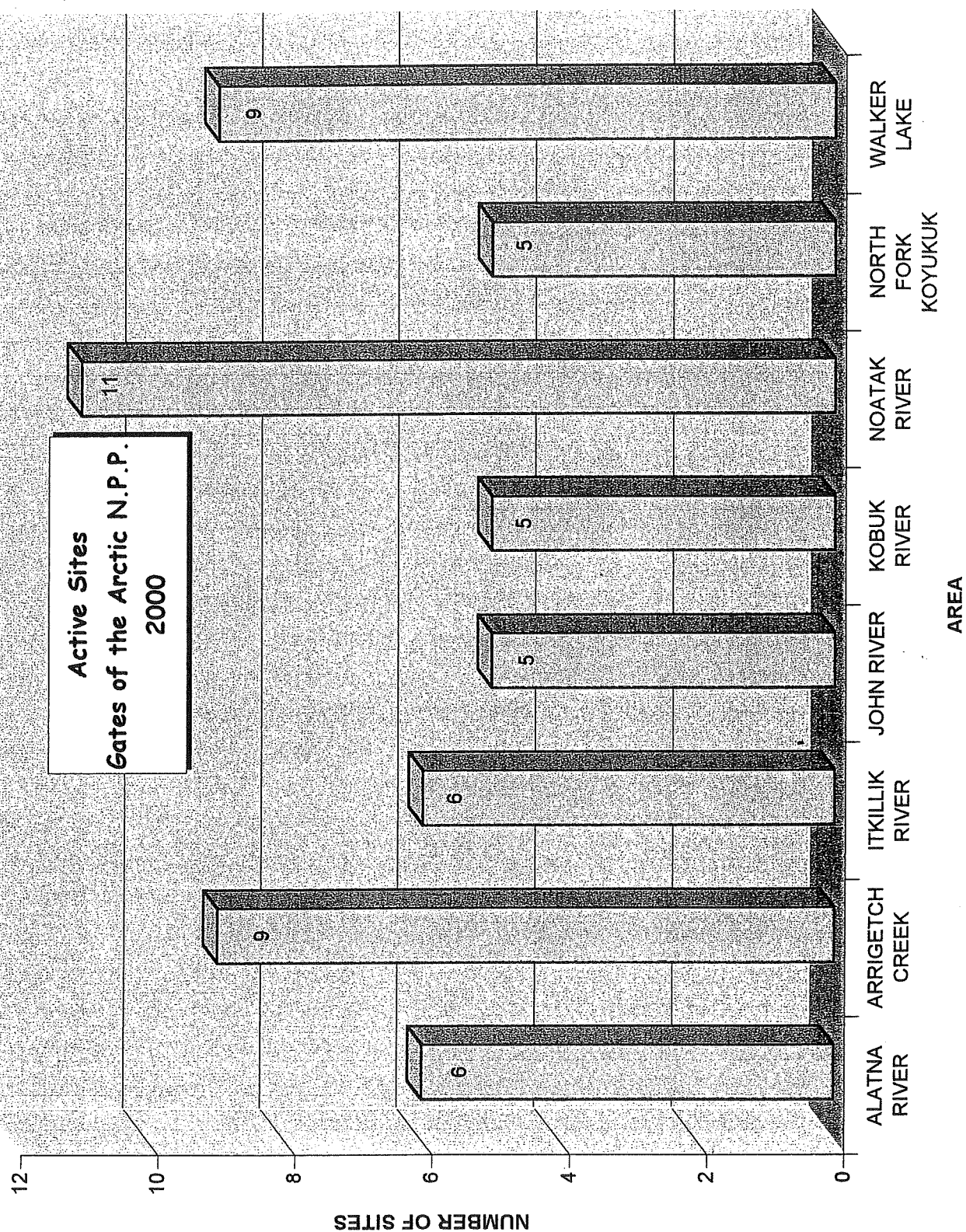
# **ACCESS POINTS** Gates of the Arctic N.P. & P.



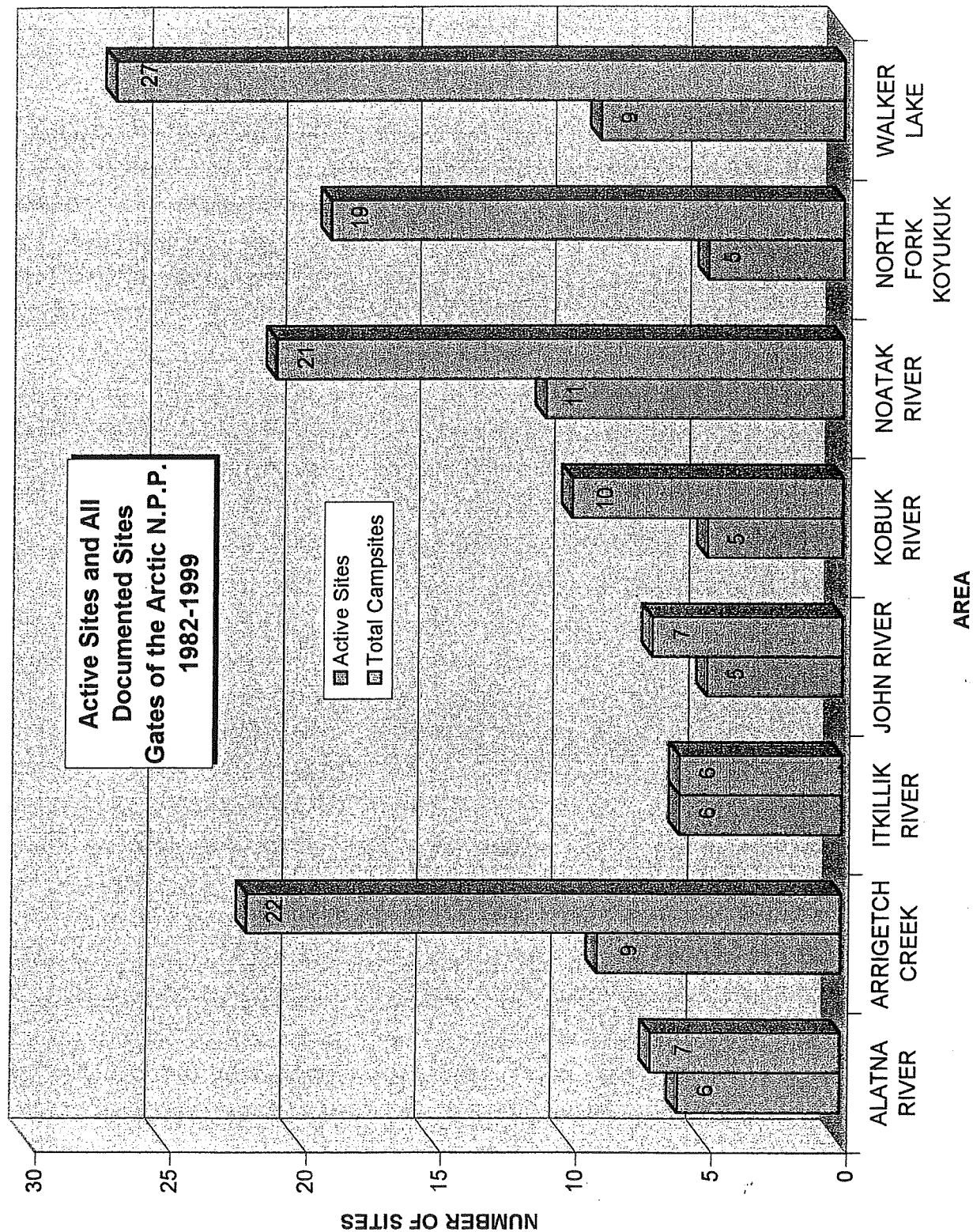
# **ACCESS POINTS & BRIM SITES** Gates of the Arctic N.P. & P.







Active Sites and All Documented Sites  
Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.  
1982-1999



# BROOKS RANGE IMPACT MONITORING

Documented Campsites

▲ BRIM Sites

~ Rivers

~ Dalton Hwy.

■ Lakes

Park Boundary

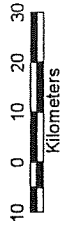
□ Park

□ Preserve

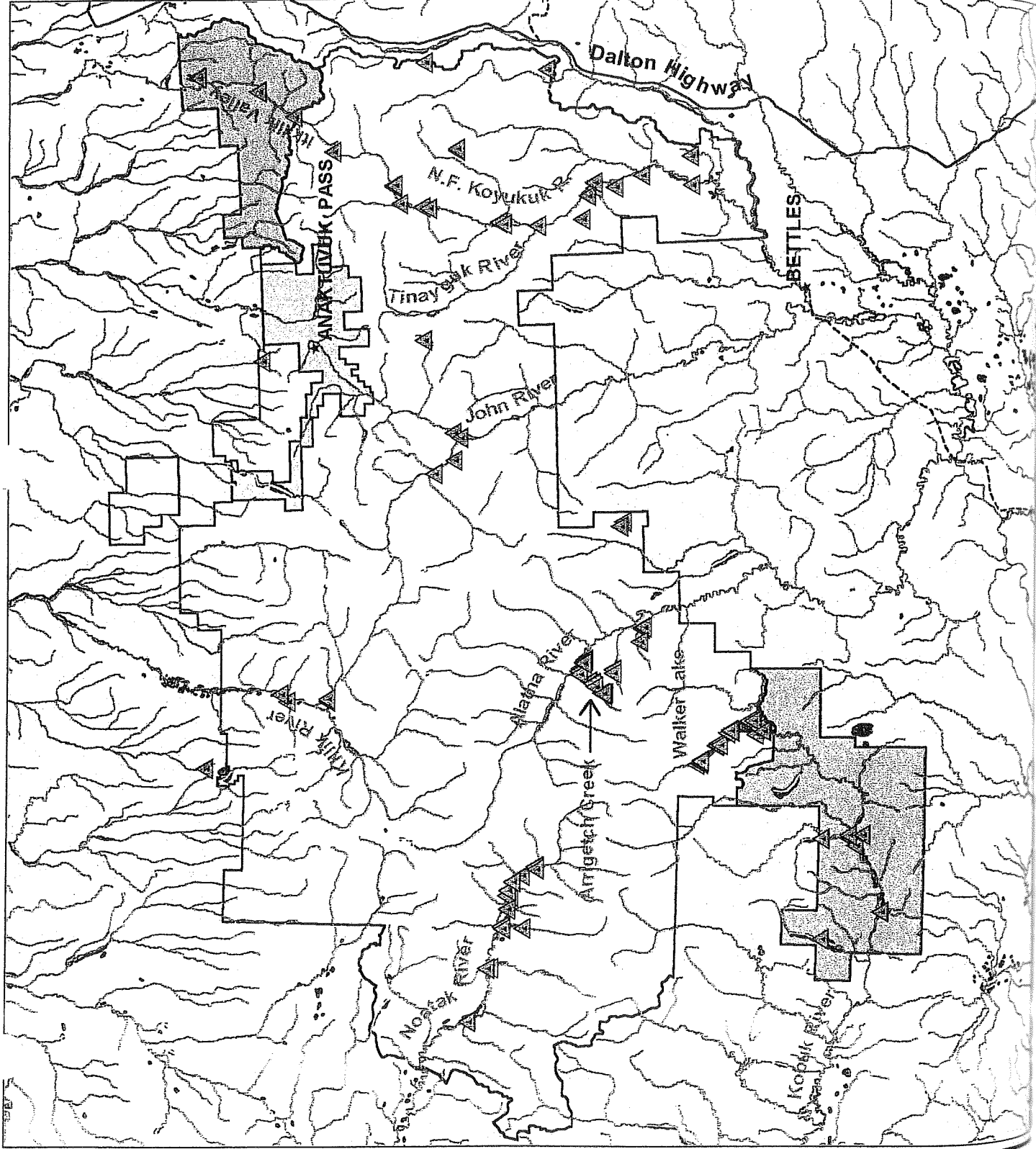
□ Wilderness



National Park Service  
Gates of the Arctic  
National Park  
and Preserve



Scale 1:1,500,000





## **ARRIGETCH CREEK**

Arrigetch Creek has shown a change in visitor use; dominated in the 1970's and early 80's by mountaineer groups, it has now become a destination for hiking parties who are interested in seeing the granite cliffs of the Arrigetch Peaks. Among the high use areas, 41 percent (9 of 22) of all documented sites in Arrigetch Creek are still actively used. Only the Noatak River has a higher percent of actively used sites (52 percent, 11 of 21).

### **Air Access**

Arrigetch Creek has only a few access points, used primarily by hikers coming from Walker Lake, Takahula Lake, Circle Lake, Kutuk Lake as well as floaters coming down the Alatna River. The main access points are Circle Lake, and to a lesser degree, Takahula Lake. Most visitors are dropped off at Circle Lake, hike up Arrigetch Creek and over to Hotsprings Creek, down the Alatna River, and eventually get picked up at Takahula Lake.

### **Foot Access**

Nearly all recreational users of Arrigetch Creek are flown in to one of the air access points discussed above. On rare occasions long distance trekkers transit the area.

### **Boat Access**

Very difficult and rare.

### **Winter Access**

Commercially guided recreational dogsled trips access Arrigetch Creek from Bettles in late winter. Operators use snow machines to break trail and provide backup to the dogsled teams. Occasional winter skiers and unguided recreational dog mushers also access the area.

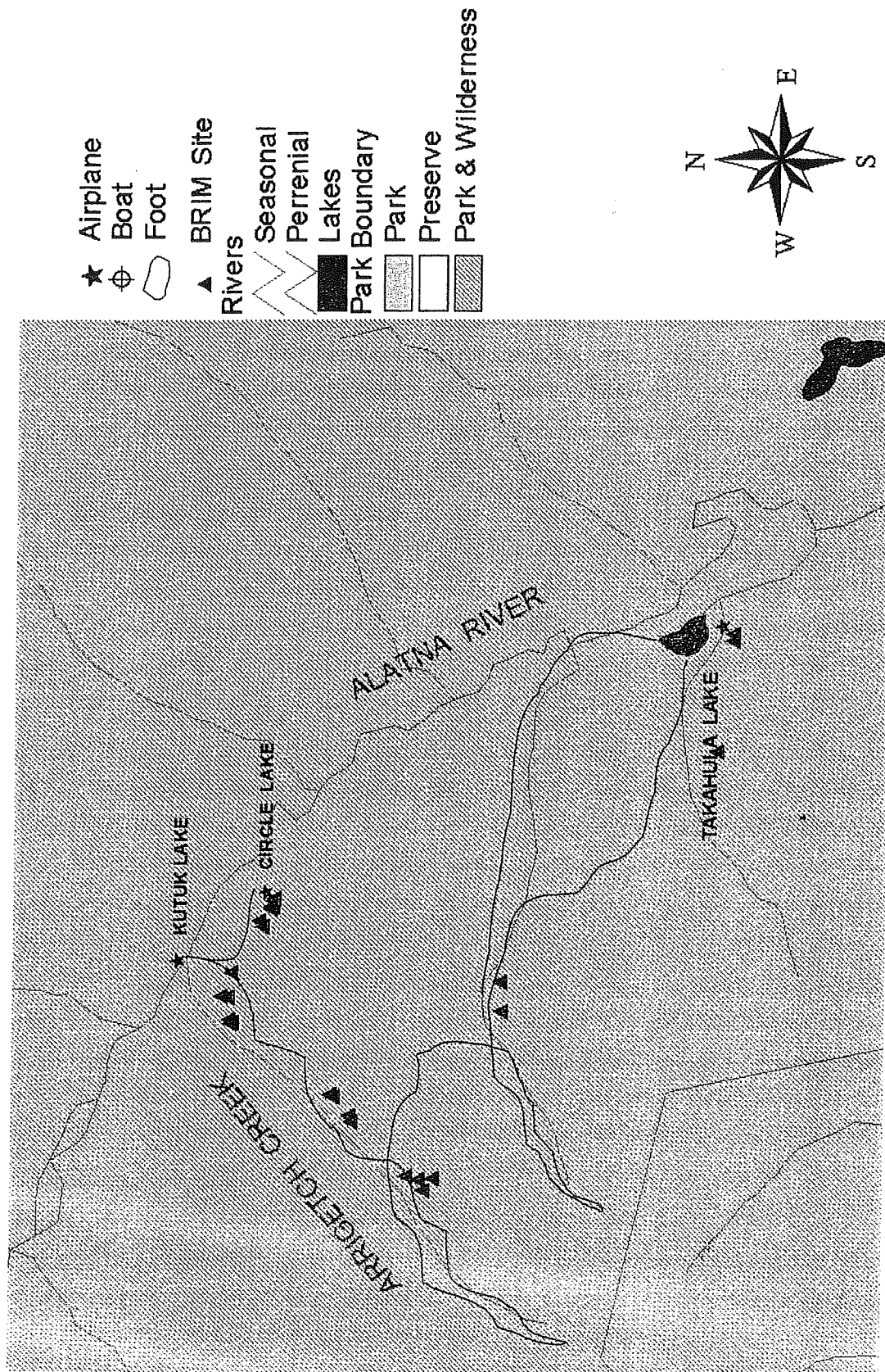
### **Seasonal Differences**

The majority of summer recreational use in Arrigetch Creek occurs between mid-June to late August. Most winter access occurs in the months of March and April, due to warmer weather and longer days. Concentrated use in the short summer season plus a single access route through a narrow valley can result in crowded conditions.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

As the majority of visitors to this area are floating the rivers, campers tend to overnight in a narrow corridor near the water. Hikers in Arrigetch Creek are funneled through the Arrigetch Creek Valley, with campsite options limited to pre-existing, well-developed sites. A good example is the main forks area of upper Arrigetch Creek. It is a logical location for setting up a base camp for both day hikers and mountaineers, and therefore gets used repeatedly throughout the summer season. Another part of Arrigetch Creek that experiences repeated use are the Lichen Knolls in the lower valley. These well used sites provide scenic views of the Alatna River valley and a first glimpse of the Arrigetch Peaks by those ascending the valley.

# Arrigetch Creek Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



## **NORTH FORK KOYUKUK RIVER**

Recreational use of the North Fork Koyukuk River (North Fork) is almost exclusively by river floaters. The North Fork Koyukuk River has steady recreational use throughout the summer and appears to have only limited subsistence use by residents of Wiseman, Bettles and Evansville. Recreational use sites along the North Fork have been largely abandoned, and/or washed out by flooding events, as only 26 percent (5 of 19) of the documented sites are still actively used. Such changes in use of the North Fork almost mirror those of Walker Lake which has only 33 percent (9 of 27) of the sites in that area still actively used.

### **Air Access**

The North Fork Koyukuk River is accessed by wheeled airplane via the Gates Bar, Kachwana Creek Bar, Ernie Creek Bar, Oolah Lake and Summit Lake in the upper Itkillik River. The remote gravel strip at Bombardment Creek heavily used in the 1980's and early 1990's was washed out by floods and abandoned. Use of the Red Star Lake access point has decreased as most visitors prefer to be dropped off further upstream and avoid the lengthy portage to the North Fork. Some visitors fly into Summit Lake at the upper North Fork and begin hikes from there. Others hike down from Summit Lake to where they have boat gear at the Ernie Creek or Gates Bars, and float down the North Fork to Bettles.

### **Foot Access**

Foot access to the North Fork is generally limited to the upper reaches. Hikers from the Dalton Highway, Anaktuvuk Pass, and the Itkillik Valley may pass into or through the upper sections on a variety of routes. Such favored routes include North Fork tributaries such as Alinement Creek, Amawk Creek, Ernie Creek, Glacier River, Chimney Pass and the Tinyaguk. Others hike into the upper Itkillik River Valley via Oolah Pass and Kuyuktuvuk Creek. On rare occasions long distance trekkers transit the area.

### **Boat Access**

River boat access into GAAR via the North Fork Koyukuk River by residents of Bettles and Evansville appears to be minimal and is generally limited to the lower stretches for summer/fall subsistence activities.

### **Winter Access**

There is occasional winter access by snowmachines from residents of Wiseman, Bettles or Evansville. Some commercial dogsled tours access the lower section of the North Fork from Bettles. Occasionally, unguided recreational mushers enter the North Fork from Wiseman or Anaktuvuk Pass.

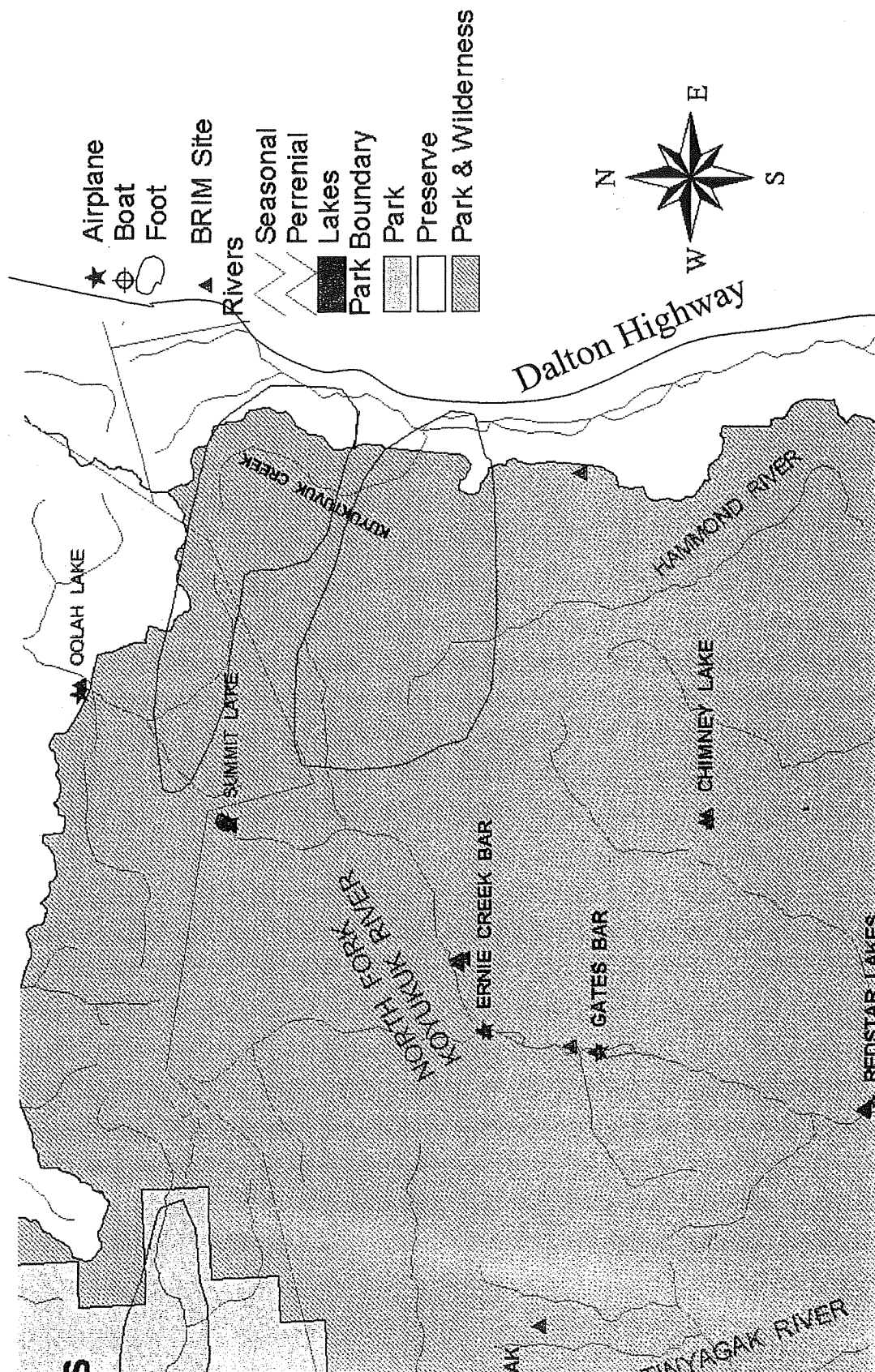
### **Seasonal Differences**

Recreational use of the North Fork is almost exclusively during the short summer months between Mid-June and Late August. Air access to the Ernie Creek Bar or the Gates Bar is dependent upon natural forces that change the configuration of the gravel bars. These gravel bars often are washed out from seasonal floods.

### Level of Human Use Impacts

Campsite locations along the North Fork are confined to gravel bars and put-in and take-out points mentioned above in the air access section. There is very little evidence of hiker related campsites away from the river. Due to the fact that floaters in the North Fork tend to camp on gravel bars, there is little evidence of human disturbances in this area. This is not evidence of minimal recreational use in the North Fork. Based on the 1997/1998 Incidental Business Permit Holder/Concessionaire Activity (GAAR Unpublished Report 2000), 13 percent of the reported activities were on the North Fork in 1998. Due to difficulties inherent in the reporting process, these figures are based on limited data (57% unusable data in 1997, and 44 percent unusable data in 1998).

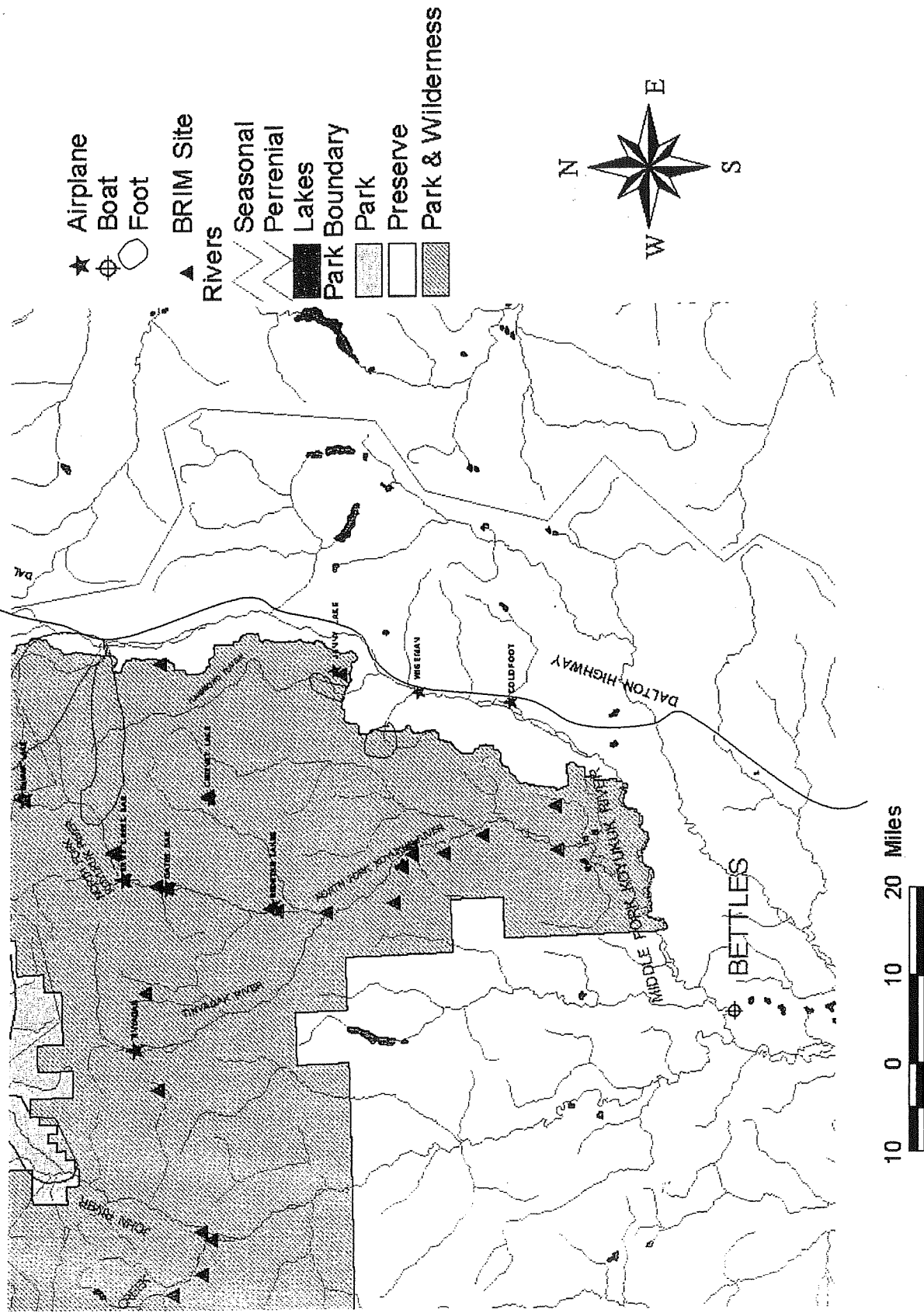
# NORTH FORK KOYUKUK RIVER Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



4 0 4 8 Miles



# MIDDLE FORK KOYUKUK RIVER Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



## **NOATAK RIVER**

The Noatak River is the most popular float trip in GAAR. Based on the 1997/1998 Incidental Business Permit Holder/Concessionaire Activity (GAAR Unpublished Report 2000), 49 percent of the reported activities in GAAR were on the Noatak River in 1997, and 27 percent visited the area in 1998. Due to difficulties inherent in the reporting process, these figures are based on limited data (57% unusable data in 1997, and 44 percent unusable data in 1998). Visitation to the Noatak River Valley increased significantly after popular outdoor magazines began publishing articles about it in the mid-1980s.

### **Air Access**

Guides and air taxi operators access the upper Noatak River from either Kotzebue, Ambler, Fairbanks, or Bettles. Many recreationists float the upper Noatak River within the GAAR boundaries, while some will float further down to Noatak Village through the Noatak Preserve. Many access points changed during the 1980's and 1990's. Currently, the most active access point is Twelve Mile Slough. Nelson Walker Lake seems to have intermittent use, while Portage Lake and Pingo Lake show signs of minimal use. Pick up points include; Isiak and Matcharak Lakes within GAAR boundaries, and Kavachurak Lake just outside the park boundaries.

### **Foot Access**

Usually minimal except for the rare long-distance backpacker and others passing through the Central Brooks Range from the east. Some guided trips are backpacking from the Alatna River headwater lakes through either Portage or Gull Pass to float the Noatak River.

### **Boat Access**

Difficult and rare.

### **Winter Access**

Residents of Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk and Anaktuvuk Pass may travel through the upper Noatak River with snowmachines from mid to late winter. Backcountry recreational use is infrequent.

### **Seasonal Differences**

As a transport corridor, the upper Noatak River experiences increased air traffic in July and August. Floating parties will see frequent air traffic on the Noatak River Valley within one week. Air taxi operators picking up floaters at either Kavachurak or Matcharak Lakes fly through the upper Noatak River Valley on their way to and from Bettles. The broad open valley of the Noatak River makes air traffic easily visible and noisy to most floating parties.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

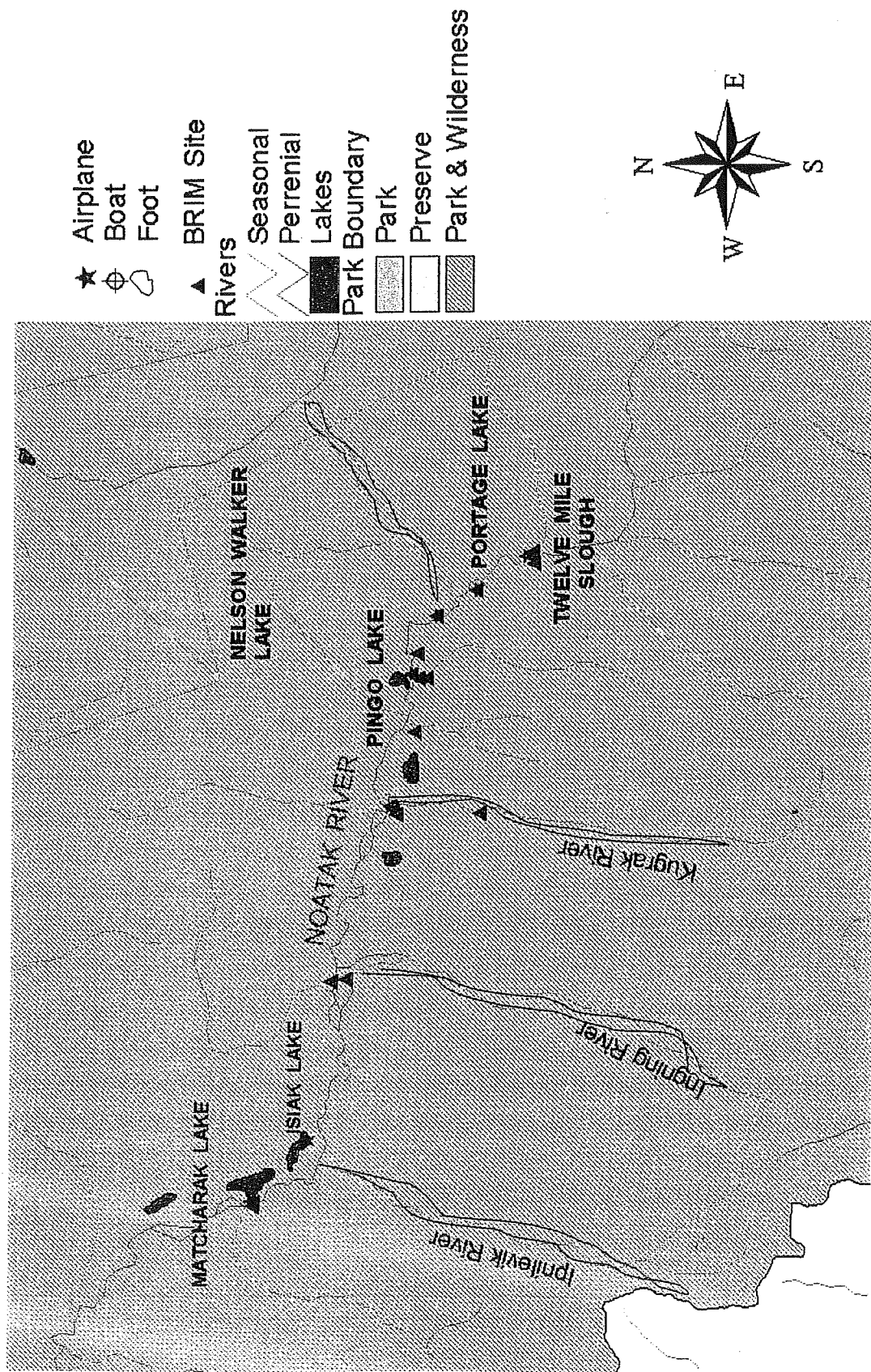
The most impacted sites are on lakes, ponds and sloughs which are often used as drop-off or pick-up points for river floaters. A good example of this is the Noatak River, where the Twelve Mile Slough drop-off point is showing increased impacts from human use. There are three well established campsites along the Noatak River near the Twelve Mile Slough. Nelson Walker and

Portage Lakes appear to show some signs of intermittent use, while Pingo Lake appears to show the least use as a drop off point at present.

Of all the high use areas (Arrigetch Creek, Noatak River, North Fork Koyukuk River, and Walker Lake) documented since the campsite inventory was established, the Noatak River has the highest number and percent of active BRIM sites. Changes in use trends continue for all high use areas. Fifty-two percent (11 of 21 documented sites) of the BRIM sites in the Noatak River are actively used.



# Noatak River Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



## **ITKILLIK RIVER**

The Itkillik Preserve can be accessed by foot from the Dalton Highway or by float planes that can land on multiple lakes in the valley. Hikers and sport hunters comprise the majority of the users in the Itkillik Preserve as river levels often preclude floating north. Recreational hikers use the area during the short summer season, while sport hunters do not arrive until sheep hunting season opens in mid-August.

### **Air Access**

The Itkillik's wide valleys provide for dispersed campsite options, reducing the number of known campsites to put-in and take-out points. Access points for the Itkillik Valley include; Itkillik Lake, Island Lake, Oolah Lake, and Summit Lake. Shainin Lake is also infrequently used by recreational sheep hunters and hikers to access the western park of the Itkillik Preserve.

### **Foot Access**

Recreational use occurs most frequently in July and August by hikers who access the area from the Dalton Highway, Galbraith Lake, or by those who fly in to lakes and ponds in the Itkillik Valley. Galbraith Lake is located along the Dalton Highway, outside the Preserve boundary. Dalton Highway access to the Itkillik River Valley is usually through Oolah Pass, along upper Kuyuktuvuk Creek. Some hikers from Anaktuvuk Pass may travel through either Ernie Pass or Peregrine Pass, eventually routing through Oolah Pass on their way out to the Dalton Highway. On rare occasions long distance trekkers transit the area.

### **Boat Access**

None.

### **Winter Access**

Residents from Wiseman access the Upper Itkillik River Valley with snowmachines through Oolah Pass and the upper North Fork Koyukuk River. Some recreational snowshoeing and skiing trips occur in March and April. Winter use of the area is minimal.

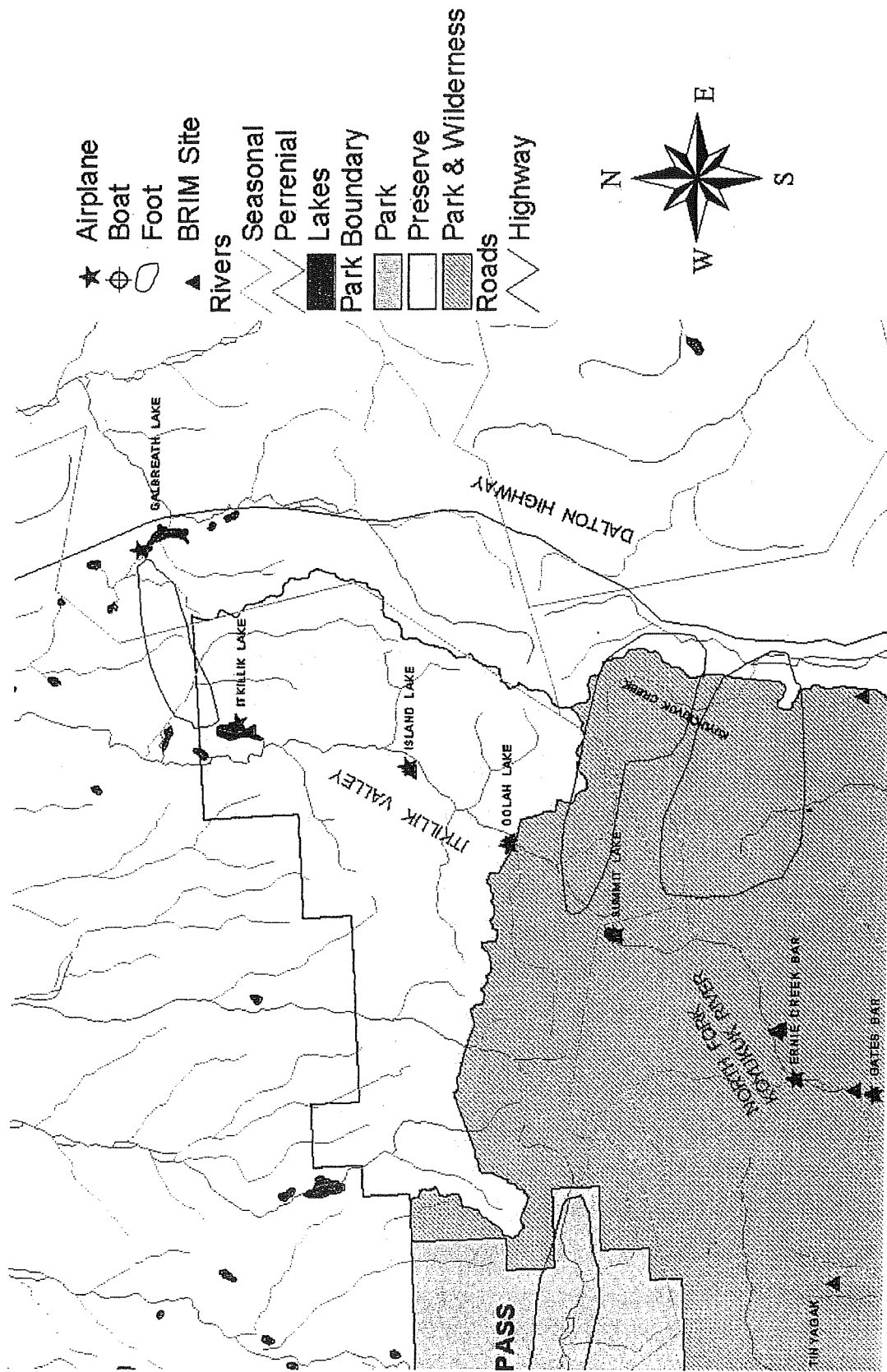
### **Seasonal Differences**

August is the busiest month in terms of visitor use in the Itkillik River Valley, since at this time both sport hunters and hiking parties share the area. Hiking parties are more concentrated in the upper sections of the Itkillik River Valley because of the ease of access via Oolah and Peregrine Passes. Sport hunters usually set up camps at access points on ponds and lakes within the Itkillik Preserve boundaries and set up spike camps near their drop off points.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

Human use impacts are limited to put-in and take-out points at lakes and ponds throughout the Itkillik Valley. Only minimal signs of human use are present in the area since the broad valley provides numerous options for campsite selection. The three main fly-in access points (Itkillik Lake, Island Lake, Oolah Lake) are the only locations having documented campsites.

# ITKILLIK VALLEY Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



6 0 6 12 Miles

## **JOHN RIVER**

Recreationists in the 1970s flocked to the wild John River to float from the headwaters at Anaktuvuk Pass or from the Hunt Fork Tributary at Hunt Fork Lake. However, the John River has seen decreased visitor use since the 1980's and 1990's. It is not known why visitor use has decreased in the John River Valley. One possibility is the lack of accessibility from Anaktuvuk Pass. The upper section of the John River is accessible during high water flow periods in late June or early July, or also during rainy seasons. Another reason for the decrease in visitor use could be due to increased commercial air traffic between Fairbanks and Anaktuvuk Pass. Floating parties must tolerate the sights and sounds of relatively frequent air traffic.

### **Air Access**

Floating parties begin trips on the John River either from Anaktuvuk Pass or from Hunt Fork Lake. Recreational users starting out of Anaktuvuk Pass can travel more cheaply than those chartering to Hunt Fork Lake. Both starting points have advantages and disadvantages. While air charter access into Hunt Fork Lake is more expensive, access to the John River is more convenient. Those flying into Anaktuvuk Pass must line (or pack) their boats and gear for several miles before reaching floatable sections of the river. Some guided backpacking trips originate at Natat Lake and pick up boats at Hunt Fork Lake.

### **Foot Access**

Occasionally hikers travel along the valley from Anaktuvuk Pass to Bettles or Crevice Creek (private airstrip) or vice versa.

### **Boat Access**

Infrequent access, predominantly for subsistence hunting by local area residents in GAAR border areas.

### **Winter Access**

Residents of Bettles and Anaktuvuk Pass may travel between villages by using portions of the "Hickel Highway" and river on snowmachines. Some dogsled tours also access the John River in the spring during March or April.

### **Seasonal Differences**

As with most other recreational use areas, the John River experiences most of its visitor use during the short summer season. Because river levels fluctuate depending on snow melt and summer rain, floating from Anaktuvuk Pass is generally restricted from mid-June to mid-July. After mid-July, river levels tend to drop off, making the upper John River less accessible to floating parties. Access to Hunt Fork Lake further downstream is less dependant on fluctuating river levels.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

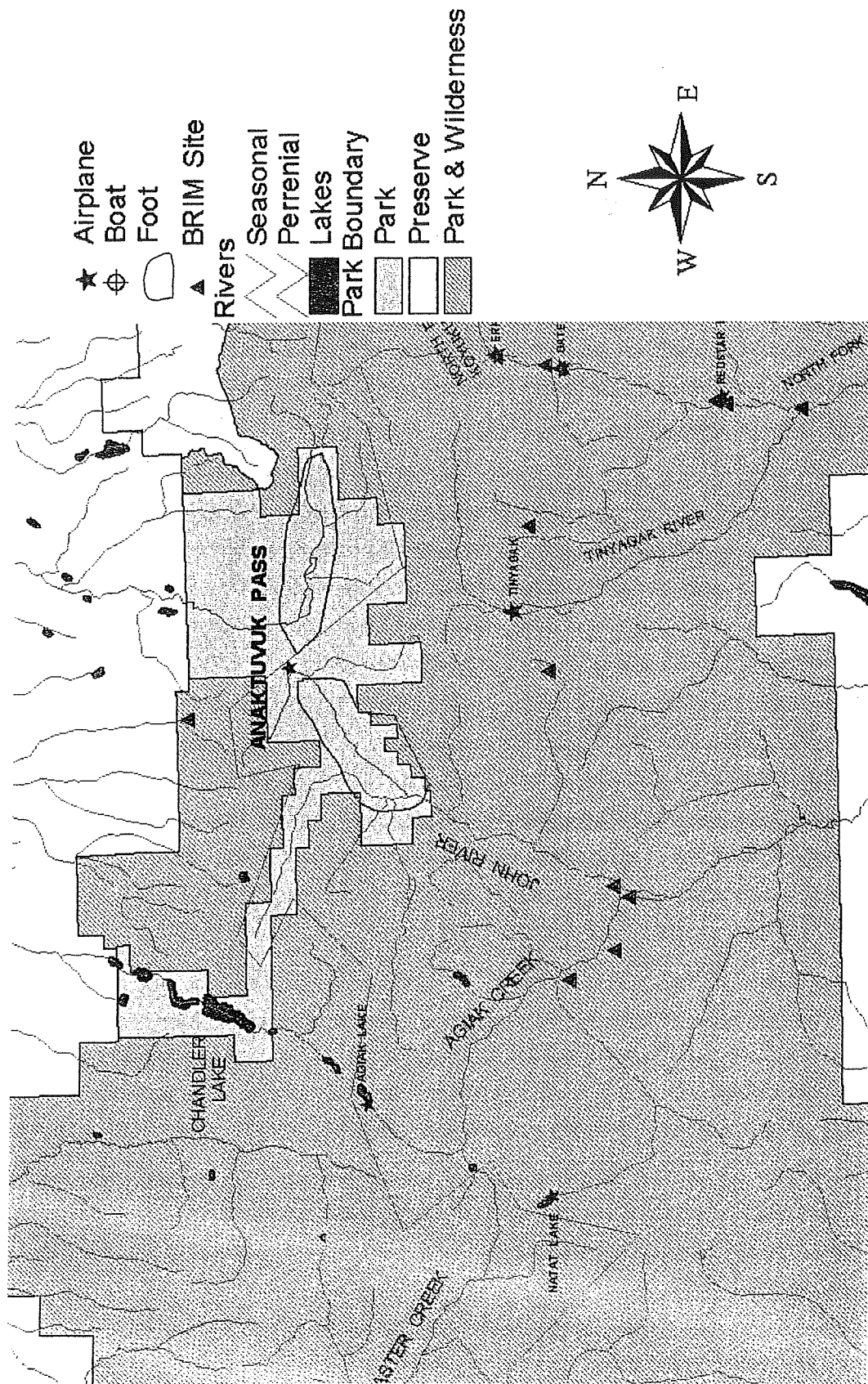
The John River is a high traffic zone for daily commercial flights from Fairbanks going to Bettles or Anaktuvuk Pass. Floating parties may therefore experience relatively frequent daytime air

traffic on their trips. The majority of human use impacts along the John River are limited to the access points described above. The Hunt Fork Lake area is the only place with documented perennial campsites. Most of the campsites along the river are on gravel bars or river benches that are spread out and not well established. Some subsistence related camps, most commonly used in winter, are present near Anaktuvuk Pass. These high impact camps are not visible from the river since the sites are located away from the river banks.

# ANAKTUVUK PASS

## Access Points

### Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.





## **KOBUK RIVER**

The Kobuk River Valley is the most complex use area. Residents of Shungnak, Kobuk and Ambler subsistence fish, hunt and gather plant materials in the upper Kobuk River in the summer and the fall seasons. Sport hunters and fishermen also use the area from early August through mid-September. Recreational floaters generally visit the area from early July to early September. All of these activities by various user groups result in increased boat and aircraft access in late summer and early fall.

### **Air Access**

Recreational floaters begin trips from Walker Lake, Selby Lake, Minakokosa Lake, or landable sections of the Kobuk through July, August and early September. Some float down to the villages of Kobuk, Shungnak, or Ambler and catch commercial flights back to Kotzebue or Fairbanks. Others may elect to be picked up downstream of the Pah River confluence along the upper Kobuk River by a chartered float plane from Bettles.

Sport hunters and sport anglers fly in from Kotzebue, Bettles, or Fairbanks between early August and early September to take advantage of the fall hunting and fishing seasons. Guided sport-hunters fly into the larger lakes along the Kobuk River corridor to hunt for caribou and moose. Sport anglers usually charter a floatplane from Bettles or Kotzebue to the Pah River confluence area.

### **Foot Access**

None. On rare occasions long distance trekkers transit the area.

### **Boat Access**

Villagers from the communities of Kobuk, Shungnak and Ambler access GAAR along the Kobuk River with motorized river boats, used for subsistence activities. Limited numbers of subsistence users access the Kobuk Preserve as resources are often available closer to villages. Sport fishing / hunting guides and transporters also use powered watercraft for access and camp resupply.

### **Winter Access**

Rare.

### **Seasonal Differences**

Recreational floaters along the upper Kobuk River are the only users present consistently throughout the short summer season. Most subsistence activities take place in the fall fishing and hunting seasons, although some intermittent use may occur throughout the summer season. Sport hunting and fishing generally occurs only during the fall season.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

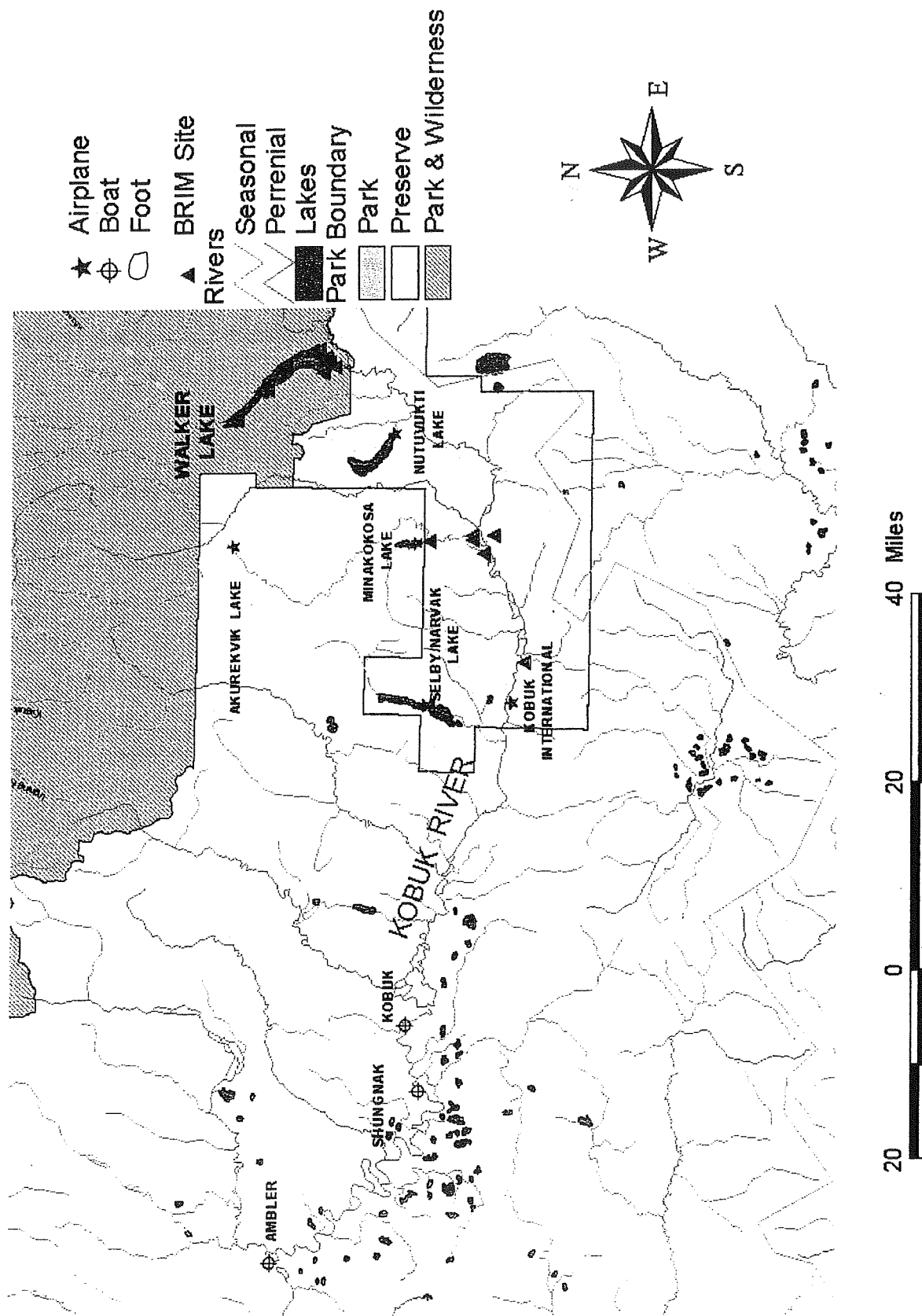
Recreational hunting and fishing activities are consumptive in nature, involve slightly larger parties, colder weather regimes and different visitor expectations. Campsites are more frequent in the

trees and are often significantly impacted. Downed firewood use and the need for meat poles, wall tents, tarps etc. naturally increase impacts, especially at put in and take out points.

Guided sport hunters are only allowed upstream of the Reed River confluence, due to the local subsistence users who are sensitive to perceptions of crowding and competition for resources.



# Kobuk River Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



## **WALKER LAKE**

Some visitor use changes have occurred since the upsurge in recreational interest in GAAR began in the 1970's and which has continued into the present. One of the major visitor use changes occurred at Walker Lake, where a fishing and hunting guide was operating prior to park establishment in 1980. Increasing interest in floating the Kobuk River resulted in an increase in the use of lower Walker Lake during the mid-1980's. Most campsites throughout Walker Lake have been abandoned and are beginning a slow recovery. Currently only 33 percent ( 9 of 27 sites) of the documented human use site are actively used. Use at the lower end of the lake appears to be moderate at present. (See Table 1).

### **Air Access**

Most air access into Walker Lake is limited to the lower stretches of the lake near the outlet that flows into the upper Kobuk River. A majority of recreational users begin Kobuk River float trips from Walker Lake. Most charter float planes from Bettles, while others charter from Fairbanks. Some small private airplanes fly in from Fairbanks for sport fishing and short periods of recreational use on Walker Lake. Land owners around Walker Lake also fly in for recreational activities with canoes or rafts equipped with small outboard motors. Map reference for Walker Lake is in the Kobuk River section.

### **Foot Access**

Rare. Occasional long distance trekkers transit the area going between Walker Lake and the Alatna River.

### **Boat Access**

None.

### **Winter Access**

Rare.

### **Seasonal Differences**

Winter use of the area is either nonexistent or minimal. Summer use is almost strictly associated with access to the Kobuk River for float trips. Figures for fly-in sport fishing are not available for Walker Lake, although limited recreational use occurs around the long weekends such as the fourth of July.

### **Level of Human Use Impacts**

Changes in use patterns from the 1970s and 1980s, from guided fishing and hunting to increased recreational use at Walker Lake has led to concentrated visitor use along the lower section of Walker Lake, near its outlet. Infrequently used sites on the perimeter of the lake continue to see repeated low levels of impacts. This outlet area became the focal drop off point for floaters of the Kobuk River. Eight well established campsites near the outlet have been documented since the early 1980s. Wildfires in 1994 as well as 1999 changed the character of the area by scorching the

understory and thinning the already sparse spruce forest. This, combined with changes in use patterns, focused campsites to just three locations near the outlet.

## OTHER AREAS

### Dalton Highway

The Dalton Highway is the only road from which foot access into GAAR occurs. Hikers also begin trips from Anaktuvuk Pass. The harsh terrain of the Central Brooks Range with its mountains and passes, ranging from 3 to 6,000 feet, dictate moderate to strenuous hiking conditions. Multiple river crossings through this rough terrain provide additional challenges for hikers. The hiking season in the Central Brooks Range is relatively short, beginning in mid to late June and ending in late August. In high rainfall years, river crossings at access points along the Dalton Highway may be dangerously high, discouraging most recreational hikers. Poor gravel road conditions and difficult driving along the Dalton Highway may discourage people from driving this route, and therefore from gaining access into GAAR via the road system. (Refer to the North Fork maps.)

Kuyuktuvuk Creek is a popular access point for hikers into the upper Itkillik Valley and the upper North Fork Koyukuk River. Some hikers do loop trips through Oolah Pass, to the upper Itkillik Valley, and down the North Fork Koyukuk River, returning via Kuyuktuvuk Creek or Hammond River. The Kuyuktuvuk Creek valley is dominated by arctic tundra and has no documented signs of campsite development because of dispersed camping and minimal use. Lack of parking spots along the Dalton Highway may limit access to Kuyuktuvuk Creek. There is only one parking spot along the Dalton Highway at mile 224 (to access the lower Kuyuktuvuk Creek Valley), which is several miles South of the access route to the upper Kuyuktuvuk Creek Valley.

Although the Hammond River may see some hiking traffic, it is considered a low use area because of the lack of convenient access points. Some hiking parties may access the upper Hammond River from the lower Kuyuktuvuk Creek.

A winter trail from upper Wiseman Creek, through Glacier Pass provides access to the abandoned Mascot Creek mine. This trail begins along a dirt road that serves the Nolan Mine at the confluence of Nolan and Wiseman Creeks. The trail is occasionally used by those wishing to pan for gold along Mascot Creek as a recreational activity.

A landing strip at Galbraith Lake also occasionally provides access for hikers entering the Preserve, or heading to Anaktuvuk Pass.

### Anaktuvuk Pass

Commercial flights from Fairbanks provide direct access to Anaktuvuk Pass. Comprehensive visitor use statistics are not available for hikers taking trips that originate in Anaktuvuk Pass. Some hike from Anaktuvuk Pass to the Dalton Highway through Ernie Pass. Others dayhike or do multi-day loops in the Anaktuvuk Pass area. Occasional floaters begin their John River float trips from Anaktuvuk Pass. (Refer to the John River section for the Anaktuvuk Pass map).

There are well developed all terrain vehicle (ATV) tracks and trails along all major drainages originating in the village of Anaktuvuk Pass. Sections of these ATV trails provide easy hiking, although portions may be sloppy with wet mud during the summer hiking season. These well used ATV trails are generally on private lands surrounding the community.

Winter recreational activities in GAAR are minimal because of harsh winter conditions. Some late winter or spring activities, such as skiing and guided dogsled tours or private recreational outings occur on a more limited basis.

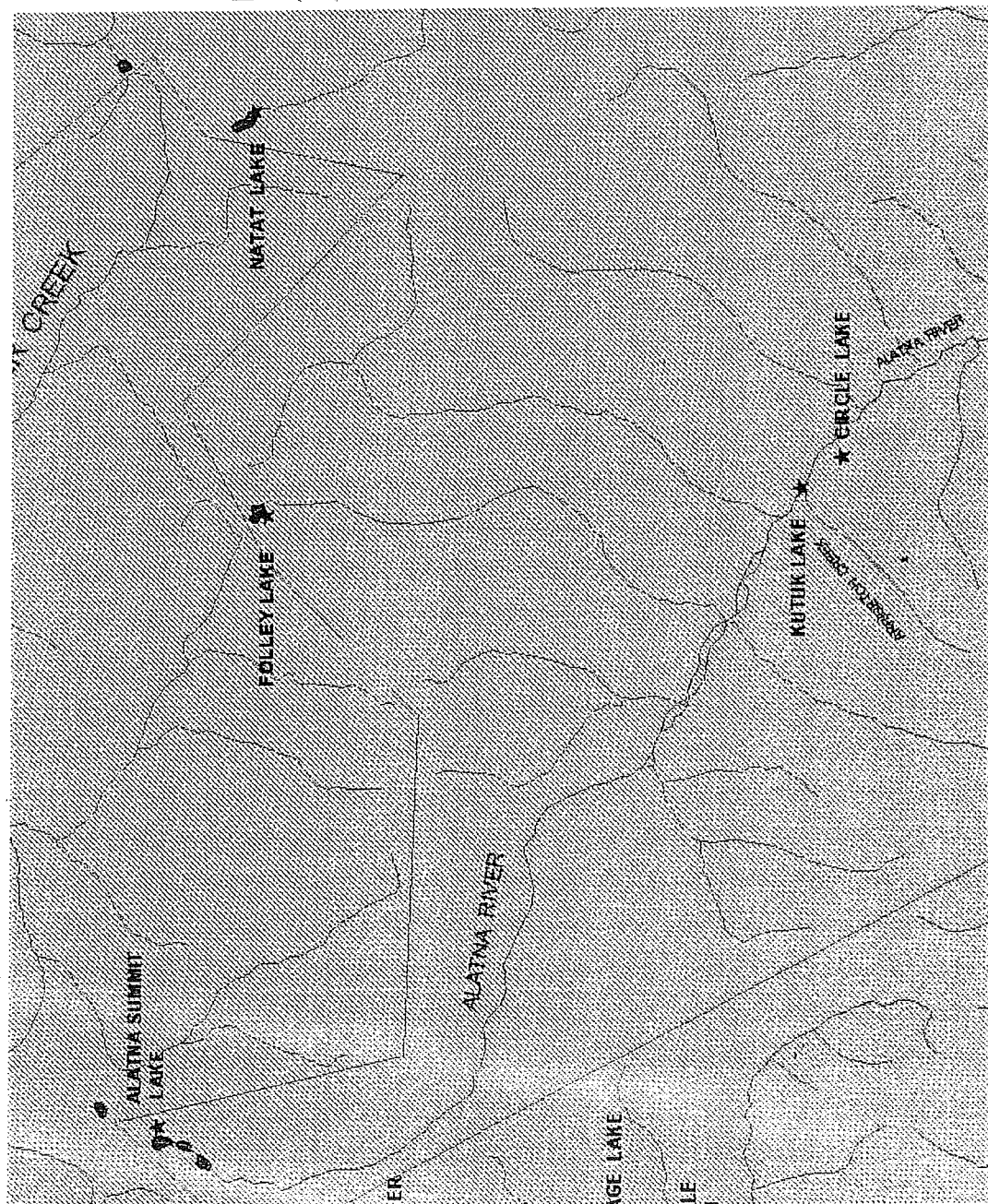
### Alatna River

Recreational use of the Alatna is mostly for recreational river floating. Floaters begin trips by flying into the Alatna Summit Lake via chartered air taxi operators from either Ambler, Kotzebue or Bettles. Often these parties spend a few days in areas where they can hike into such as Arrigetch Creek before resuming their river trip. Most of these floating parties stop at Takahula Lake for a scheduled pick up. Some may float further down the Alatna River to the villages of Alatna or Allakaket, and fly out with commercial air taxis.

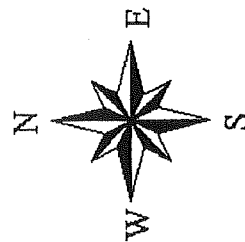
Residents from Alatna and Allakaket may boat up the Alatna River for summer and early fall subsistence activities. Some subsistence use occurs along the lower Alatna River within GAAR boundaries.

The Alatna River valley is sometimes relatively busy in terms of aircraft overflights. Air taxi operators based out of Bettles fly through the Alatna River Valley to access the Noatak River (via Gull or Portage Passes), Alatna Summit Lake and Arrigetch Creek. The Bettles Lodge / Air Service also offers sightseeing flights over the park. Some sightseeing flights from Iniakuk Lodge (just outside park boundaries along the Alatna River) may also fly through the area as they tour the Arrigetch Peaks. Alatna River floaters may, therefore, experience high airplane traffic on good weather days in July and August.

# Upper Alatna River Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.

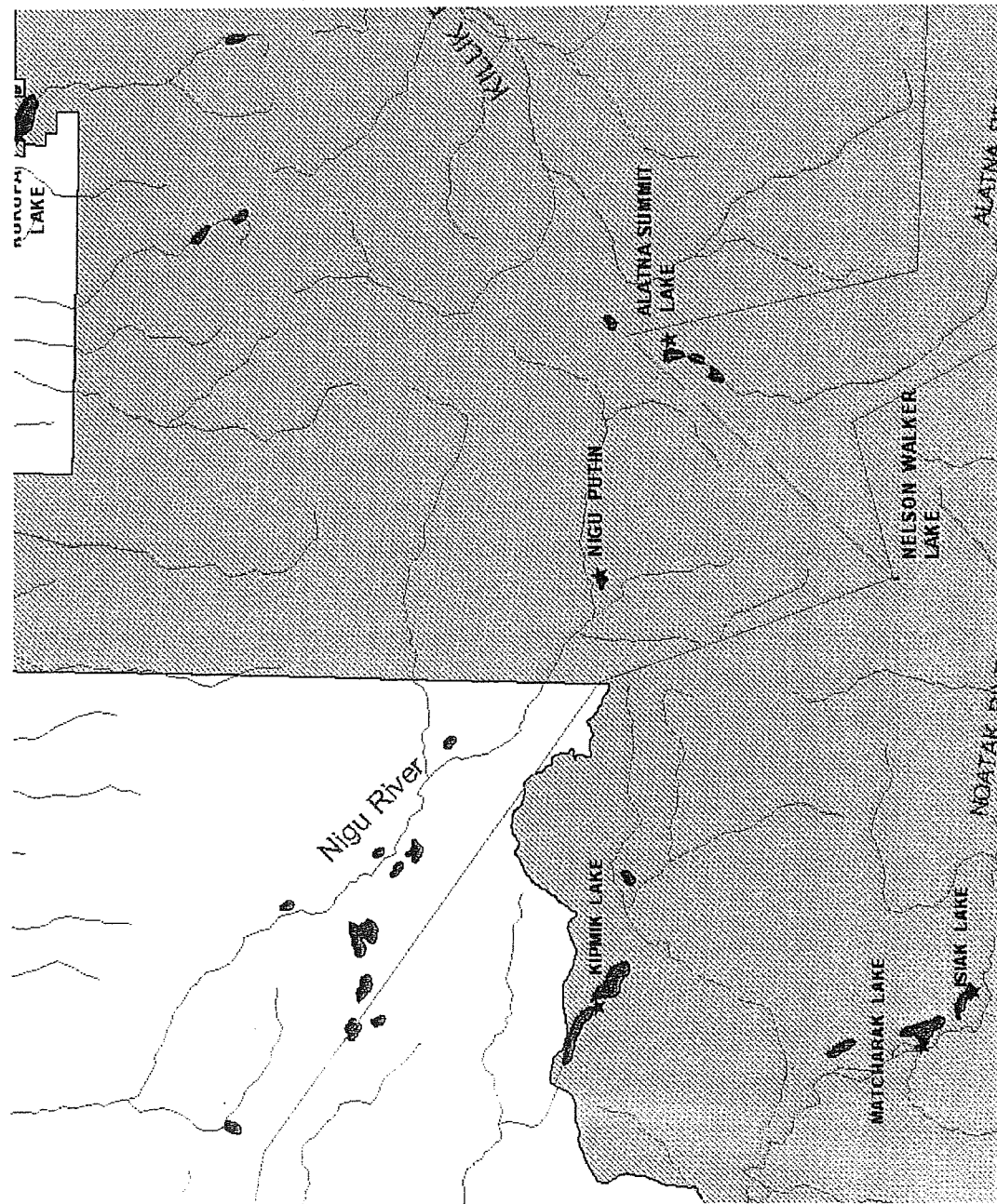


- ★ Airplane
- ⊕ Boat
- Foot
- Rivers
- Seasonal
- Perennial
- Lakes
- Park Boundary
- Park
- Preserve
- Park & Wilderness
- Roads
- Highway

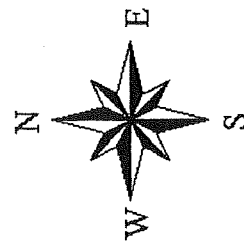




# Nigu River Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.



- Airplane
- Boat
- Foot
- Rivers
- Seasonal
- Perennial
- Lakes
- Park Boundary
- Park
- Preserve
- Park & Wilderness
- Roads
- Highway





### Killik River

The Killik River was an infrequently visited area until recently. Visitor use in the area only increased as air taxi operators began to promote the opportunities for wildlife viewing in the open terrain of the Killik River Valley.

While the Killik River Valley is in a remote part of GAAR, it has multiple access points in the upper Nigu River, Easter Creek, and April Creek. The main access route for air taxi operators based in Bettles is either through the Alatna or John Rivers. Floating parties can use the Killik River to access the Colville River on the North Slope further downstream. They may begin their trips from Tulilik Lake or other unnamed lakes and ponds near the Easter Creek confluence with the Killik River. Occasionally a party will begin a float from the upper stretches of April or Easter Creeks. Hiking parties may begin their trips from access points at Easter Creek or from Folley Lake on upper April Creek. Hiking parties also access the Killik River area from Natat Lake and Folly Lake in Kutuk Pass.

Recreational use campsites are limited to access points in the Killik River Valley. Few campsites are established because of relatively limited use of the area. A trend in increased use may result in permanent campsite development on the Killik River. Winter recreational use is almost nonexistent. Limited intervillage snowmachine travel occurs between the upper Kobuk Villages and Anaktuvuk Pass, as well as some winter trapping by Anaktuvuk Pass residents.

### LITERATURE CITED

National Park Service. General Management Plan, Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve, Alaska, 1986.

1997/1998 Incidental Business Permit (IBP) Holder/Concessionaire Activity Summary Report. Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve. Unpublished Report 2000.

# KURUPA LAKE Access Points Gates of the Arctic N.P.P.

